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ABSTRACT

Educators seeking public support for schools seldom look to positive parental attitudes toward education as keys to garnering that support, according to the authors of this report. Instead, educators tend to focus on attempts to change negative attitudes. A study was conducted using the Parent/Teacher Attitude Scale to obtain the opinions of parents and teachers in a suburban school system concerning various programs, facilities, and personnel. As hypothesized, teachers responded more positively than parents in most areas. The authors note that, after the study was completed, parents, teachers, and board members were informed of the results and told in which areas responses to the survey were most positive and in greatest agreement. This report concludes with an outline of a process for involving parents and school personnel in cooperative planning based on areas of agreement. The authors suggest that the concept of seeking and reinforcing positive attitudes could be extended to include feedback from students, administrators, board members, and district residents in addition to parents and teachers. (PGD)

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RESOLVING DIVERGENT EXPECTATIONS AMONG THE MULTIPLE PUBLICS OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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A paper presented in the session, "Everybody Wants Everything Today: Coping with Public Expectations of the Public Schools", at the annual meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, February 18, 1982, Houston, Texas.

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I. INTRODUCTION

There exists an urgent need for bridging the gaps between parents and schools and for teacher to "treasure the bridges" they have with parents (Hymes, 1980). To do this, schools must seek out and capitalize upon all agreement between school personnel and parents.

School personnel are crying for support from the multiple publics in America. Problems being faced include lack of parent and community support, apathy towards education by our society as a whole, teacher negativism and burnout, and decreasing governmental support in relation to relative price increases brought about by inflation. Yet, educators seldom look for positive attitudes of parents toward education as keys to garnering support. Instead, emphasis is focused on negativism from parents. This may be due to a lack of specific knowledge concerning public attitudes about various programs facilities, and personnel in the field of education.

Attitudes expressed about schools tend to be diverse among school staffs and the public (Kremer, 1978; McTeer, Blanton, & Spivey, 1979). A PROBE report (Duea & Bishop, 1980) compared the views of superintendents with the 1979 Gallup Poll of the public's attitude toward the public schools. While the public indicated lack of discipline as the major problem, superintendents ranked it as thirteenth. Poor curriculum and low standards was seen as fourth among major problems by the public, but superintendents ranked it fifteenth. On the other hand, superintendents rated parents lack of interest as the fifth major problem facing public schools, whereas, parents gave it a rating of tenth.

It is crucial today that parental support be enlisted at home and in the schools. It is essential parents be well informed by educators about the educational programs offered in the schools. School systems need to tell parents <u>how</u> they can lend support to the learning activities and facility needs of the school or district. In doing this, educators would be well advised to be cognizant of the positive attitudes of parents and use them to gain support rather than focusing on negative attitudes and attempting to change such attitudes.

William B. Banach says there are ten ways to "parent proof" a school (Banach, 1980). He feels schools should not be "parent proof". Instead, it is his belief parents should be allowed to participate thereby giving the schools and staff a positive posture. By doing this, a partnership is developed among the school district, school, and parents and obstacles to the partnership are removed (Banach, 1980).

The type of partnership approach suggested by Banach is advocated when studying parent and teacher attitudes and looking at positive responses and agreement areas rather than focusing on negative attitudes and differences. The National Parent Teacher Association has announced it is now going to change its television viewing ratings to recommend good family viewing instead of bad shows. This stresses the positive rather than the negative. Does it not make sense for those of us in education to see how we are similar to parents instead of looking for differences which may increase negative feelings?

This study was conducted to describe parental attitudes, indicate their relative positive/negative nature, and to determine whether they differ importantly from those of school personnel. Generally, teachers may have a more positive attitude toward programs, facilities, and personnel specifically than do parents, probably because teachers possess greater knowledge and understanding of the school system (Oaster, 1980). To address divergent expectations, specific data were given parents, board members, district administrators, and teachers in the three areas previously mentioned, specifically programs, facilities, and personnel. The data fed back pertained to within-school and within-district attitudes.

II. DATA FEEDBACK

The data fed back were responses to the Parent/Teacher Attitude Scale (see Appendix A for sample items of the 3 subscales). As previously stated, it was generally expected teachers would have a more positive attitude toward schools than parents. Data seem to support this (see Tables 1 & 2). Given there is not a morale problem in a school or district, we would generally expect teachers to have a more positive attitude than parents. It could be further speculated that parent attitudes will more closely approximate

those of teachers in a building or district if parents feel a part of the school or district, that they have a vested interest, and that their participation is sought by district personnel.

Regarding data fed back, parents were given information where their attitude was similar to that of teachers and where they were more positive. Teachers were given data showing items on which they and parents agreed, as well as, areas in which they had most positive attitudes. Board members were fed back information concerning areas in which parents and teachers were in agreement, items showing the most positive attitudes by parents or by teachers, and mean scores for each group on the three subscales (programs, facilities, personnel).

III. THE MODEL

The model for use in reporting attitudes of parents and teachers toward their school and district represents nothing new or creative. Rather, it represents a combination of available approaches that have been used and found to be effective. What is new is that the model stresses positive attitudes and areas of agreement of parents and teachers instead of focusing on the negative. It zeros in on how the groups are alike regarding their attitude toward the school and the school district.

A. IN-DISTRICT BUILDING MEETINGS

1. People Involved
   a. teacher representatives
   b. parent representatives
   c. administration representative
2. Structure
   a. data analysis of items agreed upon and items most positive by parents and by teachers
   b. parent involvement opportunities to support the school
   c. building goal and objective setting
   d. commitment

B. TOTAL DISTRICT MEETINGS

1. People Involved
   a. board representatives
   b. administration representatives
   c. parent representatives
   d. teacher representatives

2. Structure
   a. district data analysis of items agreed upon and items most positive by parents and by teachers
   b. parent involvement opportunities to support the district
   c. district goal and objective setting
   d. commitment

C. IMPLEMENTATION OF GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

1. district-wide
2. building(s) within the district

D. EVALUATION

1. district - replication of district Parent/Teacher Attitude Scale
2. building(s) - replication of building(s) Parent/Teacher Attitude Scale

IV. CONCLUSION

We have attempted to show that our data allow a positive approach to garner support from the publics of our schools by focusing upon similarities rather than upon differences.

Another sector of "the public" which could be included in a model of this type are the students of the school district. This would be done so that student attitudes could be related to those of parents and teachers. It seems that even when students' attitudes diverge from those of school personnel, parents' attitudes are in agreement with attitudes expressed by teachers (Oaster, 1981). Additionally, administrators and board members attitudes could be obtained. A last source would include residents of the district not having children enrolled in or attending school in the district, thus resulting in a comprehensive collection of data from the "combined publics" supporting the school district.

This model would appear to be applicable to private, as well as public schools, and may be applicable to higher education. In this last instance, sources of initial attitude data would differ.

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APPENDIX A

	AGREE STRONGLY		NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE		DISAGREE STRONGLY
PROGRAMS					
6. Too much money is spent on athletics within PCSD	1	2	3	4	5
7. The Physical Education program is adequate for all students.	1	2	3	4	5
FACILITIES					
2. PCSD is not adequately equipped to service the disabled student.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I feel PCSD is pleasing to the eye.	1	2	3	4	5
PERSONNEL					
6. School administrators in PCSD are sensitive to the needs of their teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
7. A teacher should not get involved in teaching controversial subjects as some teachers now do.	1	2	3	4	5

Adapted from Oaster, T.R.F. Are differences guaranteed in "Teachers vs. the public?" a paper to be presented at the annual meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, Houston, Texas, February 18, 1982

TABLE 1

SUBURBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

MEAN SCORES

Area	Teachers	Parents
Programs	56.43	52.43
Facilities	50.21	46.06
Personnel	60.86	55.32

TABLE 2

SUBURBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

MEAN SCORES

Area	Teachers	Parents
Programs	51.62	50.62
Facilities	48.50	45.78
Personnel	53.73	53.83